

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

Character Analysis

Each instructor develops his or her own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but they should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

Getting Started

In a character analysis, the writer examines how the author depicts characters within a story/play. The writer can examine the characters themselves, the role they play within the story, or how the author chooses to reveal key details. One can begin by asking questions such as these:

What seems to motivate the central characters? Do any characters change significantly? Do sharp contrasts between characters highlight important themes?

What are the characters' beliefs, hopes, dreams, values, fears, virtues, etc.? What do they say and do to reveal themselves? What do others say about fellow characters?

Characterization

Refers to the various means by which an author describes and develops the characters in a literary work.

Direct Characterization: Explicitly presenting or commenting on the characters through details revealed directly to the audience; telling the reader about characters

Example: *"Oh, but he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!"* (*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens)

Explanation: In this quote, Dickens states for the audience exactly who the character is; he makes the judgment for the audience that the character is an evil, callous, and sinful old man.

Indirect Characterization: Moving characters through events and revealing their actions, statements, thoughts, or feelings; showing the reader what the character is like

Example: *"Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front"* (*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens).

Explanation: Here, Dickens allows the audience to make their own judgments by offering physical descriptions. He only alludes to possible conclusions without explicitly providing them for the audience.

Types of Characters

Protagonist: The main character in a work; usually also the hero or heroine, but sometimes an antihero

Antagonist: The character pitted against the protagonist; an evil antagonist who attempts to defeat the protagonist is a villain; the antagonist is not necessarily always a villain but may simply be a hindrance to the protagonist

Foil: A character whose contrast with a main character serves to accentuate that main character's distinctive qualities or characteristics

Stereotype: Something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially, a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or critical judgment

Flat/Round: A flat character is very simple, often defined by a single idea or quality, and usually has one defining characteristic; a round character is much more complex, more similar to real people

Static/Dynamic: Over the course of a work, static characters experience no significant change regardless of the plot events; dynamic characters change drastically for better or worse in response to circumstances and experiences in the plot

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement in a character analysis should make an assertion about aspects of a specific character or multiple characters. The writer should then attribute his or her assertion to the author.

Sample structure: *In (work), (author) characterizes (character) as a foil to (character) because (support), (support), (support).*

Example: *In "Tale of Two Kats," Samulburge can be classified as a foil to Houstonheim because of the contrasting characteristics: A, B, C.*